

Holiday Heaven

Our fabulous stay at Sinah Warren , Hayling Island

Day One

We're all going on a summer holiday

No more housework for a day or two.

We are veterans of Warner hotels now. Each one has been totally different and so it was with a sense of eager anticipation we left Lincoln to journey to our destination, the Sinah Warren hotel at Hayling Island. I'm sure I'm not the only one who had never heard of the place, but for the geographically inclined, it's across a short causeway from Havant, near Portsmouth. The roads were pretty clear and the weather gods seemed on our side too, for the week promised to be warm and sunny. Perfect!

First impressions are very important, and we were delighted with our first glimpse of the hotel. We parked a short way from Reception, then walked through a beautiful avenue of sunflowers to the main entrance. There were palm trees, a beautiful rose garden and a delightful, shady terrace where many of us decamped for a cool drink before unpacking. This proved to be a very popular haven during the rest of the week, as you could sit, sipping a cold beverage, and look across the beautiful lawns to the Solent sparkling in the sunshine. Finally, we dragged ourselves away and found our room, only to be delighted once more. It was bright, airy and very nicely decorated, with fluffy towels and luxurious toiletries in the bathroom, not these horrible skinny tubes you sometimes get. So far, so very good.

The evening meal cemented our contentment with the venue. The layout was sensibly structured so that it avoided the queues we have found in other hotels. The choice was varied and the quality excellent. So what was the entertainment going to be like? The Sailaways provided the warm up to the main act by the resident Warner troupe, who delighted us with a visit to Café Chapeau, a Parisian café which was frequented by such stars as Sinatra, Elvis, Michael Jackson and George Michael. Excellent. The name of the hotel is unusual-Sinah Warren- and could be derived from a type of long-haired rabbit. Certainly they would have been quite at home in the warren of corridors you had to navigate to reach your rooms. All part of the fun! And so to bed.

Day Two

This was our free day, and as usual, there was so much to do in the hotel that most chose to stay locally. They offered French bowls, quizzes, archery and axe throwing (Oh for Donald Trump as target practice!) Some wandered round the gardens or went for a walk along the beautiful coastline, stopping for a well -earned ice cream. There were ferry rides, cafes, all with beautiful views. Some chose to enjoy the perfectly located outdoor swimming pool, heated to just the right temperature, and then collapse onto the surrounding loungers to read, relax or people watch. This facility was a bonus and very much added to people's enjoyment of this hotel.

My friend and I decided to explore, however. As we were the only two to do so, I will describe briefly where we went, should you find yourselves in this area in the future. I am very interested in Roman history, so our first port of call was at Fishbourne, about an hour's ride away on two buses. Fishbourne Roman Palace is the largest Roman villa north of the Alps and was established very early on in the conquest of Britain, namely 75AD, and contains some of the earliest and most complete mosaics in the country. It was huge, half of it still buried underneath local houses. The gardens have been laid out as they were in Roman times and the mosaics carefully preserved, especially one with Cupid riding a dolphin. Beautiful. Well worth a visit. From there it was a short hop to Chichester, a lovely old town with a stunning cathedral, containing both mediaeval and modern art, including a window by the 20th century artist Marc Chagall. (If you have seen the film *Notting Hill*, his was the painting Julia Roberts gave to Hugh Grant.) Again, somewhere to visit in the future.

After another excellent meal, the entertainment that night was a comedian, Lee Carol, a difficult act as people's senses of humour can be so different. He kept us well entertained into the night however with his witty one-liners, until we got out our phones to use Google maps to locate our sleeping quarters. A great day all round.

Day Three

This was a journey, not just to a place but to our past, a voyage into Britain's heroic naval history. We started with modern events at the D Day Museum and the only remaining landing craft, LCT7074. Its commanding officer, Lieutenant John Baggott, painted this Latin saying round the bridge: *Dum Spiro Spero*, meaning *Whilst I breathe, I hope*. What better motto for the gruesome task ahead! It set out from Hebburn in April 1944, made its journey to Gold Beach on the evening of D Day and landed its tanks the next morning. It made many more journeys carrying food supplies and more tanks till it was decommissioned in 1947 and became a club ship in the Albert Dock, no less! I am very glad this noble vessel has been restored to its proper place in history. To see it with two tanks still on board gave us some insight into that awful, terrifying crossing to the blood-soaked beaches of Normandy.

The rest of the exhibition contained mementos, personal accounts, examples of armaments and audio-visual commentary. One explained how everything hinged on the weather, the subject of the forthcoming film *Pressure*. It certainly was for Captain James Stagg, the RAF's chief meteorologist, who had to give the OK for the attack that would change the course of the war! What can you say about those extraordinary men and women? How can we ever thank them? Perhaps just remember that they had their day on the beaches so that we can continue to enjoy ours in peace and security.

Back further into our past, we disembarked at the Historic Naval Dockyard. Some climbed The Spinnaker Tower for spectacular views, whilst others explored the area. *HMS Victory*, Nelson's flag ship, is undergoing renovations. *HMS Warrior* could also be visited, but we chose to journey back to Tudor times and explore the fabulous *Mary Rose* museum. The story of its restoration is almost as amazing as its actual history. Intended to be Henry VIII's flagship, it was badly designed and grossly overloaded, so that it sank in the Solent with the loss of 500 lives in 1545. You can see the remains of her hull- hard to think of her as an inanimate object- and the objects found on her, from magnificent cannon to everyday utensils, give a unique insight into Tudor times. It's not cheap, but an unforgettable experience.

Once again we returned to Sinah Warren for another excellent dinner and tonight's entertainment, a double bill of James Austin's comedy and music and the effortless vocals of Benidorm's very own Asa Elliott. Then follow the trail of breadcrumbs to your suite for a comfortable sleep.

Day Four

Southampton also has a long maritime tradition, but today we were concentrating on the SeaCity Museum, in particular the story of the *Titanic*. I was unaware of its strong connection to the city, but as you walk into the exhibition you are confronted by a wall of faces, all of whom hailed from there and who were lost in the disaster. It had 897 crew members, of whom over three quarters were living in Southampton. Cleverly, the museum highlighted the individual stories of those involved, from the captain Edward John Smith to the crew and the lookouts. Graphic eye-witness accounts emphasised the horror and the panic of that terrible night. What shocked me most were the accounts at the end from the inquest into the tragedy. What a tale of blunders that was: not enough lifeboats; warnings ignored; ill equipped lookouts and an over-ambitious managing director who wanted to break the Trans- Atlantic speed record. It made me feel so angry! From a ship's complement of 2,208, 1,635 perished! Fortunately, lessons were learned and modern ships must carry adequate lifeboat provision, have lifeboat drills and properly staffed and equipped stations. I could not help comparing the *Titanic* to the equally ill-fated *Mary Rose*, both monuments to human ambition and arrogance which resulted in needless loss of life.

We were glad to return to the warm sunshine and explore the rest of the city. We found a lovely mediaeval church and the Tudor House Museum and Gardens, with a fabulous café overlooking the latter. Others relaxed in M&S or Wetherspoons, hopefully equally effective in shaking off the gloom of what we had just experienced. This was another fabulous day out, helped no doubt by the continued glorious weather. Terrace and restaurant next!

The show for our last night was a trip to the "Movicalls" with the Warner Theatre Company and I have never seen a better show at any Warner's hotel. The numbers from *Chicago* I found particularly professional, but the whole show was superb. To crown it all, I found my way back to my room without a guide!

Day 5- The Voyage Home

All good things must come to an end- even this holiday. Overall impressions? This was one of the best hotels we have stayed in, although I am aware there were accommodation issues for others which was very unfortunate. The food was excellent, the service and evening entertainment also. The outdoor pool and terrace provided the icing on our holiday cake. The trips were interesting, thought provoking and did not involve too much travelling, ideal in this heat. The highlight for me was that wonderful sunflower avenue, welcoming us home after an exciting day out.

We made it home with only minor hold-ups due to road works and traffic. I am still thinking of all the things we saw and did. It truly was a memorable holiday. Thank you, Jane, for your research and for organising hotels and trips; so much work involved, I know. Thank you to Chris, always on hand to help. It makes such a difference to have a driver you can trust, and we are very lucky to have Stewart at the wheel, a very safe pair of hands. But the final

congratulations must go to Brian, who managed to come back with exactly the same people he left with! Who says miracles can't happen?

Thank you all.

Barbara Pearce